

Birding by Ear & Beyond at U. of M. Dearborn

Oakland Owlet's families and friends met on a sunny Saturday in August at the Environmental Interpretive Center (EIC) on the University of Michigan campus in Dearborn. Our group joined Donna Posont's "*Birding by Ear and Beyond*" program. This inclusive program is held monthly at the EIC for visually impaired friends. Donna, legally blind, initiated this program. Donna is nationally recognized for her work and was featured in the Fall issue of Audubon Magazine. Here is the link in case you missed it - [Donna Posont Helps Blind People Become Birders—and Whatever Else They Want To Be | Audubon](#)

Donna encouraged the Owlets to join one of her monthly programs. We started indoors with an introduction to listening to bird calls along with other sounds made by animals.



Using Audubon Birds, Donna helped everyone learn phrases associated with bird songs. Everyone enjoyed using the Audubon Birds. After this introduction, the group prepared for a hike on the trail.

It was a beautiful sunny summer day. Our first stop was the Pollinator Garden adjacent to the EIC. Donna explained that the garden was an insect magnet. Several flowers were in full bloom from Asters to Goldenrods. Everyone could hear the insects buzzing in the garden from blossom to blossom. Many birds eat insects and need them to survive. Just beyond the garden, we connected to a trail into the forest.

The EIC is located at the western edge of the University of Michigan's Dearborn Campus and is the gateway to 120 acre natural area which serves as living laboratory for environmental study. This natural area was donated to the U of M Dearborn Campus in 1959 by the Ford Motor Company. The natural area has over three miles of trails and two miles of the main branch of the Rouge River along its western boundary. The Rouge River Bird Observatory operated at the EIC from 2001 to 2018 to study the importance of urban natural areas to bird conservation.



Along the trail the group occasionally stopped and Donna shared interesting natural features that involved using senses other than sight. In the woodlands, we heard a few birds including Black-capped Chickadee and Tufted Titmice. When the group reached Fair Lane Lake, a couple of open areas provided great views of birds foraging for insects over the water. Mixed groups of swallows glided overhead snatching flying insects including Tree Swallow and Barn Swallow. Everyone stopped for a time along these openings.



Eventually we all heard the chattering rattle call of the **Belted Kingfisher** patrolling the lake. This stocky crested bird was hunting along the lake's edge in search of fish and other aquatic prey. A few of us were rewarded with a glimpse of this bird. The group continued along the trail, circling the lake. At the north end of the Lake, the trail veered into a more forested habitat with some wetland pockets. We continued searching for birds. Our bird list



was low for the day, but just before reaching the EIC, birding traffic increased. A **Northern Flicker** along with several White-breasted Nuthatches entertained us. There were several chances to watch the Nuthatches going in and out of tree cavities. Birding at this time of the year can be slow.

When we reached the EIC, the Owlets' families and friends thanked Donna and Mike Solomon from the EIC for sharing their expertise and knowledge of the property. Donna shared more information about insects and invited everyone to attend her upcoming monthly hikes at the EIC.



The checklist for the hike included 18 species of birds. Several common expected species were not seen. Nevertheless, everyone enjoyed the hike and sharing the walk with other birders that can only bird by ear. A complete checklist for this hike is available upon request.



Photo Credits: Kathleen Dougherty & Oakland Bird Alliance.